

Posted on Fri, Jun. 24, 2005

## Rally slams bingo-machine proposal

By Tom Lochner CONTRA COSTA TIMES

**SAN PABLO -** Several dozen community activists, religious leaders and public officials rallied in front of St. Paul Catholic Church Thursday to denounce plans by the Lytton Band of Pomo Indians to install bingo machines at Casino San Pablo. A smaller group later marched to the casino, concluding what seemed, said City Manager Brock Arner, "a non-event unworthy of media coverage."

Technically still a cardroom offering pai-gow, poker and other card games, Casino San Pablo is undergoing interior alterations to install 500 bingo machines by Sept. 1.

On Tuesday, the San Pablo City Council approved a \$31,300 consultant contract to study likely traffic impacts of the transformation. The casino is on San Pablo Avenue at San Pablo Dam Road, off Interstate 80.

Bingo machines, Class II gaming machines under federal law, are allowed on Indian reservations. Unlike Class III Las Vegas-type slot machines, they do not require a compact between the tribe and the state.

The 91/2-acre Casino San Pablo property, which includes the building and a large parking lot, became an Indian reservation in 2003 by virtue of a rider that Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, tacked onto an appropriations bill in 2000.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein has sponsored legislation that would take the Lytton property out of federal trust and force the tribe to go through the regular, cumbersome reservation approval process that the Miller rider circumvented. Feinstein's bill could come to a vote Wednesday.

Thursday's protesters supported the legislation.

"If this gets through the Senate, it has to go to the House of Representatives," said Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, who had spoken at the rally earlier. "It's important for the public to send a message to the Bay Area delegation in the house that they don't want urban gambling."

Because of advances in technology, "there's no real, substantive difference between Class III and bingo slots," Gioia said. "It's a classic case of the law not keeping up with the technology, and the tribe's taking advantage of that."

Installing the machines in San Pablo is "a major event," Gioia said, "because it would be the first time there is Nevada-style gambling in an urban area in California."

Other speakers included community activist Andres Soto; a Methodist minister; a representative of Assemblywoman Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley; and Oakland Councilwoman Jean Quan, whose city has been eyed as a promising locale for an Indian casino.

The rally's sponsors included the East Bay Coalition against Urban Casinos. Oakland-based Full Court Press, a public relations firm working for Bay Area card clubs Artichoke Joe's of San Bruno, Oaks of Emeryville and California Grand of Pacheco, provided logistical support.

Howard Dickstein, an attorney for the tribe, said Gioia is wrong to equate Class II and III machines.

"Bingo gaming devices don't generate anything like the revenue of a slot machine," Dickstein said, adding, "I wish that they did, because if they did, Lytton wouldn't need a compact, let alone a compact that offers 25 percent of slot machine revenue to the state."

Last year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the tribe signed a compact giving the state a 25 percent share of net gambling revenue, but the Legislature never ratified it.

"These (bingo) devices are simply electronic replicas of the game of bingo," Dickstein said. "There will be video screens that replicate bingo cards. They play much more slowly, and players play against each other for common prizes."

Dickstein said he is confident Feinstein's bill will not become law. Not only would it be "another example of a broken promise to a tribe," he said, but "I think a majority of the members of Congress agree it would constitute an unconstitutional taking of the tribe's property without just compensation."